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FROM US MISSION UNESCO PARIS

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TAGS: SCUL UNESCO

SUBJECT: ROLE OF U.S. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

Summary: The role of the U.S. National Commission is to support the work of the U.S. Mission to UNESCO by drawing on the experience and expertise of its Commissioners and mobilizing the resources of US civil society. To that end, the National Commission should, in consultation with the Mission and IO, develop a work plan that will advance the goals and priorities established by the USG for UNESCO. The Commission will have five committees that parallel the five sectors of UNESCO. Each of the committees should identify projects that will reinforce the work of the corresponding sector at UNESCO or of UNESCO as a whole. The Commission should also give advice to the US Mission on personnel issues, as well as provide strategic advice for the on-going negotiations on UNESCO's Convention on the Protection of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions and the Declaration on Bioethics.

End Summary

11. The US National Commission for UNESCO will hold its first annual meeting in Washington DC on June 6/7. At that time the Executive Director of the Commission should propose a plan of action for the members of the Commission. The plan should consist of possible projects for each of the five committees of the Commission that would reinforce the work of the US Mission by utilizing the substantive knowledge and strategic expertise of the commissioners. The following are suggestions for appropriate activities.

12. The Education Committee could contact universities around the country to inform them about UNESCO's University Chair Program and the UNITWIN Program. These programs encourage universities to develop initiatives that promote research and networking in areas that come within UNESCO's mandate. Since these are programs for which the National Commission has direct responsibility, the Committee should be proactive in its approach. It should generate high quality applications that adhere to the criteria already established by the Commission. When applications arrive at the National Commission, the Committee should review the applications and make preliminary choices on which ones deserve to be sent on to UNESCO for final decisions.

13. The Education Committee could also focus on helping to advance the goals of the UN's Education For All initiative (EFA), particularly in the area of teacher training in Africa and post-conflict countries. Many countries at UNESCO consider teacher training to be one of their top priorities. The Committee could do research on effective teacher training programs, especially in the area of literacy and non-formal education. It could work with ECA and the NEH on possible teacher exchanges or modeling programs. It could help determine those characteristics that are common to all quality teacher-training programs, and those that are culture-specific. Since Mrs. Bush is the Honorary Ambassador for the UN's Decade of Literacy, it would be appropriate to put a particular emphasis on the problem of illiteracy.

14. The Culture Committee could help reinforce UNESCO's new program on endangered movable objects. This program, initially funded by the USG, focuses on building capacity in museums in developing and post-conflict countries in areas such as inventory creation, object identification and preservation, display techniques, and museum administration. The Committee could organize a meeting or conference for museum professionals to discuss this program and examine ways for them to share their expertise in these areas. This might include identifying museums interested in partnering with museums in developing and post-conflict countries, and discussing the possible establishment of an information-sharing portal at UNESCO.

15. The Culture Committee could also strengthen UNESCO's World Heritage Program by providing expertise for the development of effective conservation and management plans for heritage sites in the developing world. As one of UNESCO's flagship programs, the World Heritage Program needs to maintain a reputation for high quality. Given the USG's interest in cultural and natural preservation, both nationally and internationally, it is appropriate to help this program deal with its current problems and challenges by getting actively involved with it.

16. The Culture Committee could also provide valuable cultural expertise and policy advice to the US Mission for developing effective negotiating and public relation strategies that would promote USG interests in the proposed Convention on the Protection of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions. The most recent version of the proposed Convention, which would be a binding treaty for the USG, lacks clarity and contains elements that are unacceptable to the USG. The committee could also review small grant funding proposals through available through the Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity and identify possible financial resources for those proposals.

17. The Natural Science Committee could support the work of UNESCO's International Hydrological Program (IHP) by assisting in the re-establishment of the US National Committee for the IHP, and by developing criteria for proposed new water research centers in the US. It could also identify ways to support the USG's efforts to be elected to the Governing Council of the IHP at UNESCO's General Conference in October 2005.

18. The Natural Science Committee could also help define what is meant by the term "sustainable development." Given UNESCO's new role as the lead agency for the UN's Decade for Education for Sustainable Development, the Committee could identify appropriate ways that building capacity in engineering, water, and science education could contribute to promoting sustainable development. Of particular importance are gender parity issues related to women in science, mathematics, engineering and education. The Committee could commission a series of background papers that might assist UNESCO in determining what its specific role should be in this initiative. The Natural Science Committee should work closely with the Education Committee in this area.

19. The Natural Science Committee could also support the work that is being done at UNESCO with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) as it works to develop an international tsunami warning system. It could help publicize the IOC's central role in this area and the work that the USG does as a member of the Governing Council, assuming that the US is re-elected in June 2005.

10. The Social and Human Science Committee could focus on the issue of youth and social transformation and the ethical challenges that youth face in a period of rapid social and economic change, particularly in developing and post-conflict countries such as those in the Middle East. Research papers on this topic could help UNESCO develop future initiatives in this area.

11. The Social and Human Science Committee could also provide expertise and policy advice to help develop effective negotiating strategies for the US Mission in the development of a UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics. Although a UNESCO declaration is supposed to be non-binding, many countries have openly stated that the declaration is simply the first step towards a binding convention.

12. The Information and Communication Committee could identify ways to support UNESCO's role in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) initiative. Although the International Telecommunications Union is the lead agency for WSIS, UNESCO has taken a strong stand on freedom of information issues, including freedom of the press. The WSIS process began in December 2003 at the meeting in Geneva, and will be completed at a meeting in Tunis, November 2005. The Committee could organize a conference before the Tunis meeting that could highlight USG positions on such issues as freedom of expression, internet governance, the digital divide, and the use of ICT's in education.

13. The Information and Communication Committee could also play an active role in UNESCO's International Program for the Development of Communication.(IPDC). This program focuses on capacity building in local community-based media development by identifying small programs for potential funding. The Committee could create a media press freedom fund to finance specific IPDC projects, as well as promote exchange and training programs with other USG agencies. Given the USG's interest in promoting freedom and democracy, particularly in developing and post-conflict countries, this program deserves support.

14. All of the commissioners serving on the National Commission's five committees could suggest names, when requested, of non-governmental experts who could be invited to participate in specific UNESCO events. Although decisions on experts are usually made by UNESCO, the US Mission often gives names of experts to UNESCO in response to their requests. Names of experts suggested by commissioners could be added to names provided to the Mission by IO and other USG agencies. National Commission

members could also explore the possibility of identifying quality U.S. based NGOs that work on UNESCO issues and could benefit by closer relationships with UNESCO.

¶15. Commissioners could also be provided regular up-to-date information on available full time positions at UNESCO. Since the US is currently under-represented in full time staff positions at UNESCO, qualified Americans have an excellent chance of being hired. Commissioners could use their professional networks to help recruit strong candidates for UNESCO positions. In the future, commissioners could also play a valuable role in identifying talented young Americans for UNESCO's Young Professional Program, which has just been reinstated for next year.

¶16. An additional role for the National Commission is in the area of UNESCO prizes which are awarded to outstanding individuals, organizations, and institutions that support UNESCO's goals and objectives in specific areas. The National Commission could establish a process for advertising and possibly competing for UNESCO prizes. It could also establish a committee composed of selected Commission Members that could review all applications for prizes and provide recommendations to the appropriate individuals within the State Department.

¶17. The Executive Director of the National Commission plays a critical role in providing opportunities for the commissioners to play an important role in supporting the work of UNESCO, without overburdening them. Commissioners should be reminded that except in areas where the Commission is directly responsible, such as the University Chair program, their ideas and suggestions are strictly advisory. In order to take full advantage of the knowledge and expertise of the commissioners, constant communication between the US Mission and the National Commission will be essential. Appropriate communication procedures must be established within the Commission itself and between the Commission and the US Mission.

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